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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

USACE veteran recruits others for Iraq volunteer duty

By John Connor
Gulf Region South District

TALLIL, Iraq – Tom Chamberland, a veteran of three deployments to Iraq and two Hurricane Katrina-related assignments, has a new mission. He is trying to recruit fellow members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers family to serve in Iraq.

"I'm a 30-plus year Corps employee," said Chamberland, who works for the USACE South Pacific Division in San Francisco. He said he has enjoyed the challenge and unique opportunity of each of his five temporary assignments, and that he was motivated to try to recruit people for Iraq from the Corps' stateside ranks by a desire to support those who now are serving with USACE in Iraq.

Chamberland said he made a personal commitment when departing Iraq last August to Col. Steve Hill, commander of the Gulf Region South district, and Tom Eidson, head of engineering and construction for the district, to try to recruit people for Iraq from the ranks of seasoned Corps employees.

Eidson said Chamberland was one of the few persons to deploy to Iraq who had actual experience processing USACE construction contract modifications and that he consequently was brought to Tallil from Basrah toward the end of his last tour to help with modifications.

"While he was here, we had numerous discussions about the shortfall of qualified personnel," Eidson recounted. "Tom felt we could do better at getting qualified persons over here so he said he would help--and he is actually doing that."



Tom Chamberland

[USACE Photo]

Patricia Biltoft, the personnel chief for GRS, said Chamberland "has been a big help." She said there are several people in the hiring process right now who he brought forward. That aside, she said, "What's really important is that he's talking about what our mission is and supporting us in this environment."

She said people in the States who are distant from the situation in Iraq are not as far removed now thanks to Cham-

berland's efforts.

Hill said, "The needs are great, but it is hard to convey the work environment, positive living conditions and enormous sense of satisfaction gained by serving on a mission that so directly impacts people--in this case the Iraqi people and the Corps teammates we each support every day. Tom is carrying that message by accurately detailing these benefits and opportunities."

Chamberland said he has given a one-hour slide presentation to people at the South Pacific Division and San Francisco District and the local Society of American Military Engineers chapter last month. He is off to Albuquerque shortly to give a presentation there, and he is also hoping to nail down an appearance at the upcoming Tri Service Cost Engineering Steering Committee meeting in January in San Diego.

He said he has received a number of inquiries, one of which resulted in a person arriving in GRS already. He added modestly that this person already was hoping to deploy and that "I just somewhat helped grease the skids for him..."

Chamberland's first deployment to Iraq was from October 2003 through March 2004 in Basrah as project manager forward with Task Force RIO (Restore Iraqi Oil). During his second tour, from August 2005 to December 2005, he was with the Gulf Region Central district working as resident Engineer at Ramadi. His last tour was as engineer officer with the British-led Basrah Provincial Reconstruction Team.

"Fourth tour?" he asked rhetorically.

"Quite frankly, it is the rewarding opportunity of these assignments and, hopefully, more in the future, that keeps retirement and hitting the golf course a long way out," he said. "I must add that I am fortunate in that both my personal situation—kids all grown—and fine health allow me this opportunity, and that doesn't hold true for every Corps employee."

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